

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 8D**



Commissioner Dionne Yvette Brown

**Testimony to Department of Housing and Community Development (DCHD)
Property Acquisition and Disposition Division (PADD)
Public Hearing on Disposal and Development of 199 Chesapeake Street SW
June 23, 2025**

I greet you as a lifelong Washingtonian, highly-engaged, twenty-four year resident of Bellevue, the Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner for Single Member District 8D01 where the land in question is located and as the Chair of ANC 8D. We, the Commission, have established the following position regarding the acquisition and development of the publicly-owned property by Department of Housing and Community Development's Property Acquisition and Disposition Division's chosen developer, Economical Development Solutions, LLC, at 199 Chesapeake Street SW:

1. The solicitation shall be suspended.
2. The lot shall remain in the public domain and shall not be disposed for private development without exploration of alternative uses.
3. The lot shall be developed for a purpose supporting the common good of the surrounding community.

These positions were formulated in consultation with residents, stakeholders, and Commissioners of ANC 8D. We discussed them at our May 22 Public meeting, held a Special Meeting focusing on the issue on June 12, and have drafted a resolution formalizing them for approval at our June 26 Public Meeting.

The rationale includes:

1. Failure of DCHD to meet the statutory requirements of the DC Surplus Property Disposition Act for official notification and community engagement.
2. Absence of a feasibility study to assess the multiple impacts of the proposed development on the surrounding community.
3. Saturation of SMD 8D01 with low-income housing without the addition of more upmarket housing, economic development, and amenities to balance it.

The lot in question has been undeveloped blight for well over twenty years. It has great potential and those best to judge its optimal use are those who will be directly impacted by it. The Bellevue neighborhood is full-contained in the southwest quadrant. It is bounded on the north and east by South Capitol Street, the Potomac

River to the west, and by First and Joliet Streets to the South, with just under 9,000 residents. Bellevue's pattern of development is low density to the north, medium density in its center, and high density to the south. Higher density apartments line its main traffic corridor along South Capitol Street. The houses surrounding the subject lot are detached and semi-detached single family dwellings. The residents immediately to its northeast have resided there for over sixty years. The resident on its northwest side moved there five years ago. They all shudder at the thought of the character of their immediate surroundings and the neighborhood being changed so radically. Bellevue is a place of stability where residents plant long and deep roots. We have five second and third generation residents on my block alone who made it their home after growing up there.

It is unlivable according to planning indices and is one of the few neighborhoods in the District of Columbia that has become more so over the past two decades while the rest of the city moves forward.

We are not able to address the specific plans herein as DHCD did not reveal them publicly prior to this meeting and refused to attend ANC 8D's May Public Meeting. DCHD also failed to publish its plan to dispose of the public property at 199 Chesapeake Street SW in the DC Register. Furthermore, DHCD scheduled this hearing in response to the Commission's request for the agency to appear at our May meeting and not as a good faith effort to engage the community.

Martin Luther King said: *The slums are the handiwork of a vicious system of the white society; Negroes live in them but do not make them any more than a prisoner makes a prison.* The conditions we face are by policy and design, leading to a textbook ghetto.

So I look at the May 2024 solicitation with a sense of déjà vu. The Department of Housing and Community Development's restrictions limiting the proposed housing to low-income rates is not the fault of the developer. They are simply playing the hand they were dealt. But those who pass and uphold the rules of record look at us with a straight face and pretend this is just the free market at work when it is all by policy and design.

My single member district alone has endured new low-income development inordinately over the past decade as evidenced by the following:

Address	#Units	Year of Delivery
3939 South Capitol St SW	49	2015
4001 South Capitol St SW	195	2019
17 Mississippi Avenue St SE	16	2024
3836-3840 & 3848 South Capitol St SW	106	(Proposed)
Total	366	

Physical and social conditions in the occupied apartment buildings, which we welcomed without opposition, deteriorated fast. Residents with the option to leave elsewhere have exercised them. This is not to mention 821 units in the pipeline to replace the 149 units currently at Martin's View apartment complex in the adjacent Single Member District, 8D07.



"Make it look like the free market."

Another case in point is Trinity Plaza in my SMD. The Far SE-SW Community Development Corporation (CDC) worked closely with the community to ensure their plans were compatible with our preferences. Duplex condominiums were supposed to occupy the upper levels of their building with retail on the first level and commercial office space on the second. Banks, as well as city leaders, were not confident in the ability of the condos to sell or the CDC's ability to attract

businesses. Thus, financing languished. The final product consisted of 49 rental apartments totally occupying the upper levels with a pharmacy and day care center on the ground floor. All initial tenants were housing voucher recipients.

Wholesale disinvestment has become the pattern with Bellevue. It began with white flight following disaggregation in the 1950s and 1960s. Residents were promised one-to-one replacement for the retail strip demolished to make way for a new mid-rise apartment building at 4001 South Capitol Street SW 15 years ago. We were promised:

- 100% commercial office space on the corner of South Capitol and Atlantic,
- Ground level retail with apartments in the main building, and
- A small footprint grocer with residential units above the building at 4137.

What we got was another building filled with low-income apartments and with a corner store on the ground level due to the common challenge developers face accessing capital. The first two buildings were merged into what stands now, with no commercial office space on the site at all. Department of Human Services' office that previously occupied a building at the corner of S. Capitol & Atlantic Streets was supposed to be moved to 4149 temporarily and return to the ground floor of the eventual space where Good Food Market opened. The city invested heavily to build out the space for The Department of Human Service's permanent occupancy before construction began on the building at 4001 S. Capitol Street with no intention of keeping its promises.

We have a dearth of moderately-sized market rate homes to attract residents necessary to make our demographics attractive to businesses and none are in the pipeline. Danbury Station was supposed to be anchored by detached single family houses with townhomes interspersed down the block. City leaders listened to the empty barrels that made the most noise and supported a high concentration of townhouses too small for the way families live today without a clubhouse or community center for residents to gather or entertain. It took 15 years for the original owners to accrue equity to make moving up possible. Not one of those empty barrels lived in Bellevue or bought one of those houses. Bellevue's housing stock needs diversity and improvement not more low-end, low-income units.

The adage "the road to hell is paved with good intentions" rings true in our fair city. Living has not gotten any better in the 24 years I have resided in Bellevue. Affordable housing sounds noble, but produces adverse effects when concentrated into one side of the city without market rate housing, amenities, and economic development in tandem. Meanwhile, undesired projects have been

dumped on Bellevue from prime locations without adding value to the community. Among them include the Metrobus garage, Fire Department's Fleet Maintenance Facility, and animal shelter at DC Village, and credible relocation rumors of the DC Armory and DC Jail to make way for an expanded sports complex for the Washington Commanders.

Crime statistics have experienced an upswing in the past decade with a consequent decline in my neighborhood's quality of life as the city concentrates low-income people and services catering to them East of the River. This reinforces systemic inequities and harms homeowners in said communities economically. My house is worth less than it was before the 2008 housing crash. Where else in the city is that true? Those of us who took the risk to live, invest, and plant roots in the Bellevue neighborhood are being punished while western portions of the city flourish and accrue wealth through their real property.

The consensus requests the land be used to facilitate the following quality of life improvements:

- A multi-purpose community center to serve the civic and recreational needs of residents.
 - ANC 8D does not have a public space within its boundaries sufficient to hold its meetings.
 - The Bellevue Library's main meeting room is woefully smaller than the one in the edifice it replaced, thus forcing the relocation of our polling place to Covenant Baptist UCC and larger community meetings.
 - Children do not have anywhere to play due to Leckie's playground being locked during non-school hours.
 - Leckie Educational Campus lacks a gymnasium due to expansion of the campus to accommodate three additional grades.
 - The vast majority of Bald Eagle Recreation Center's square footage is dedicated to the boxing annex and basketball courts—activities, serving only a small portion of residents. Being the only boxing annex in DC, it serves more as a city rather than community asset. It is also a mile from the subject lot and not walkable.
- Supplemental space for Leckie Educational Campus, which has expanded from an elementary school to include middle school grades.
- Preservation of adequate greenspace to minimizes air, water, and noise pollution. It also offsets greenhouse gas emissions from nearby I-295, and the highly-trafficked Chesapeake Street leading to it, through CO² absorption.

- Consideration of traffic impacts of the lot being located on an Emergency Evacuation Route and in the midst of a bottleneck with no street parking along the Chesapeake Street side. Leckie has built its expansion annex on its parking lot forcing staff to park around the parcel in question.

All housing with no community development makes for unlivable conditions. Now is the time to bestow amenities that heal our community and make us whole. The current pattern of social engineering by our city leaders is true to how capitalism treats its underclass. It does not serve us well—from residents who withstood the Crack Era by remaining invested in Bellevue to newcomers who deserve better than to be relegated to living far from opportunity and economic diversity that was the hallmark of the DC I grew up in. Distribution of affordable housing across the city more equitably would be true to what the city proclaims as its guiding principles.